

Cancer research stands to suffer

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Unfortunately, all of us have been touched by cancer. It is the second-leading cause of death in North Carolina and is the cause of about 23 percent of all deaths in this state annually.

Early detection and advances in treatments provide whatever good news there is about the deadly disease.

That is because of research — exhaustive research that is expensive. It's research that has improved a sufferer's chances against the disease. Cancer no longer has to mean a death sentence.

That is what is so troubling about the announcement that the American Cancer Society has decided to reject any donation requests from companies associated with the tobacco industry.

The society's board of directors does not want to be linked to any researchers paid in part by the tobacco industry. If a university accepts money from a tobacco company, it will be prohibited from receiving money from the American Cancer Society.

This hits close to Tobacco Road because several research projects at nearby universities such as Duke, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, N.C. State and Wake Forest are financed by tobacco companies and, according to published reports, "at least a half dozen others are funded by the American Cancer Society."

The American Cancer Society reportedly spends about \$125 million a year on research grants. The society is one of the biggest sources of research money among nonprofit organizations.

Fortunately, the federal government is the major fund provider, but \$125 million is a substantial amount of money, especially to medical schools.

It's no secret that the American Cancer Society has declared war on Big Tobacco. It's led to lawsuits and huge settlements. Some grants from the tobacco industry are part of the \$246 billion settlement with 46 states that was signed in 1998.

The society's latest stance implies that any scientific body accepting money from the tobacco industry is going to slant its findings. That's insulting. Does accepting American

Cancer Society money influence results? This is a topic being discussed in the academic community.

Actually what it means is there will be less money for research so sorely needed. Those who have cancer are the ones who will suffer.

Big Tobacco saw the handwriting on the wall years ago and today its holdings are diversified among many products. Altria Group owns both Kraft and Philip Morris. Where would the money be coming from?

Remember, no matter what any of us thinks about tobacco, it is a legal substance.

The American Cancer Society and its dedicated volunteers do good work, but we think this latest decision needs to be reviewed. Momma always said to be careful about cutting off your nose to spite your face.